



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
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DISTRICT 1

CHAIRMAN
TRANSPORTATION, INFRASTRUCTURE
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Isiah Leggett, County Executive

FROM: Roger Berliner, Chair, Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment Committee
Nancy Floreen, Member, Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment Committee
Hans Riemer, Member, Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy, and Environment Committee
Valerie Ervin, Councilmember, District 5

DATE: September 13, 2013

RE: Capital Crescent Trail and the Purple Line's Final Environmental Impact Statement

As you know, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Purple Line was recently published. It not only describes how the Purple Line will significantly improve east-west mobility by providing frequent light rail service, it also discusses the Capital Crescent Trail – which, for the first time, provides a paved, separated trail from Bethesda to Silver Spring. Chapter 3, Page 13 of the FEIS reads:

“Using funding to be provided by Montgomery County, the eastern 4.3 miles of the Capital Crescent Trail from Bethesda to Silver Spring would be constructed and paved, replacing the existing Georgetown Branch Interim Trail between Bethesda and Stewart Avenue. The Capital Crescent Trail would provide a permanent trail, separate from the roadways, from Stewart Avenue into downtown Silver Spring.”

It is the footnote that follows which causes great concern for members of the Council and our constituents:

“Preferred Alternative assumes that the permanent Capital Crescent Trail between Talbot Avenue and Silver Spring would be located in CSXT right-of-way in accordance with the County's land use plan. The completion of the trail in the CSXT corridor is contingent on agreement between Montgomery County and CSXT on the use of CSXT property on the north side of the CSXT tracks for the trail. If agreement is not reached by the time the Purple Line construction occurs, MTA would construct the trail from Bethesda to Talbot Avenue. From Talbot Avenue to Silver Spring, an interim signed bike route on local streets would be used.”

This is indeed a troubling forecast for the future of this section of the trail. Reaching downtown Silver Spring via a permanent trail separate from the roadway is vital in order to maximize the trail's utility. Yet the availability of the property needed, as the trail is currently planned, is very much in question. We believe we absolutely must do everything we can to work with CSXT toward completing this section of the trail: the FEIS makes it clear it is up to Montgomery County to do so. The current, signed bike route through local streets crosses a significant number of intersections and would greatly reduce the trail's value to pedestrians and bicyclists. On any kind of permanent basis, this is simply unacceptable.

In the meantime, at least one alternative to the route currently planned does exist, using available right of way on Fourth Avenue. Council staff is familiar with this alternative and agrees that it deserves serious exploration. We urge you to work with MTA to give this and any other possible alternatives serious consideration.

We must act with a strong sense of urgency in engaging CSXT to provide our residents with the best trail experience possible. Meanwhile, we urge you to work with MTA to thoroughly examine the feasibility of existing off-road alternatives, so that if CSXT is unwilling to cooperate we at least have other options available that deliver on the promise of the Capital Crescent Trail as an off-road trail from Bethesda to Silver Spring.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to the Purple Line and to the Capital Crescent Trail. We look forward to your response.

CC: Art Holmes, Director, Montgomery County Department of Transportation
Mike Madden, Purple Line Project Manager, Maryland Transit Administration
Françoise Carrier, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Glenn Orlin, Deputy Council Administrator, County Council
Ron Tripp, Chair, Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail